

Availability and Adequacy of Social-Support During E-Learning in Some Selected Universities in Nigeria

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.805176>

Received: 14 May 2024; Accepted: 22 May 2024; Published: 24 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the availability and adequacy of Social-Support to students during e-learning in Nigeria Universities. Survey Design was used for the study. The respondents of the study were 380 undergraduate students of five (5) Nigerian Universities that conducted e-learning during Covid-19. Data was collected using the Social-Support Scale adopted from literature, and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that students encountered negative emotions during their e-learning experiences that include: stress, anxiety, uncertainty, depression, and frustration. While students received various forms of social support from parents, teachers, classmates, close friends, and other university members, the support was found to be inadequate. No significant difference was found between male and female students on the: type of negative emotions faced; type of Social-Support obtained; and the sources from which the Social-Support was obtained. However, it was found that male students received more Social-Support than females. Therefore, it is recommended that Social-Support should be included in the preparation and implementation of any e-learning program to help students to cope with the negative emotions that might arise during e-learning. Furthermore, training should be given to teachers and staff on how to provide effective social support for students during e-learning.

Keyword: E-learning, Social-Support, Availability, Adequacy

INTRODUCTION

The technological advancement is currently challenging the Schooling system. With information explosion, education is no more limited to the four walls of classrooms. Rather, education is at the disposal of all without the restriction of time and space. As a results, we are now in the educational era known as Lifelong Education (Collins and Halverson, 2009). With lifelong education, the world of education is currently undergoing a massive transformation as a result of the digital revolution.

Although the impact of technology in education is conspicuous in the last three decades, there is no other time that the importance of this digital revolution was so glaring as at the time of Covid 19 pandemic (Sandén, 2020). This is a period where schools were globally closed and people were forced to keep away from each other to avoid the spread of the virus. It is at this critical time that e-learning became the New Normal. In the technologically developed countries, classes were automatically switched from face-to-face to e-platforms where time and space are no more barrier to learning, at the same time maintaining the rules for social distance. However, this is not the case for most developing countries due weak digitalization infrastructure. Therefore, there is no doubt that Covid 19 pandemic has forced a faster and far more widespread shift to digital learning, teaching and administration.

With the increasing integration of e-learning into all levels of educational systems, studies have shown that students encounter some difficulties during e-learning due to many factors that include: Absence of physical interaction with teacher (Argaheni, 2020); challenges in understanding of soft copy of lecture materials (Firman

& Rahayu, 2020); and students feeling of fear about their academic progress (Abdous, 2019; Andiarna & Kusumawati, 2020). Studies have shown that one way to minimize these challenges is through the affordances of Social-Support (Rehman, Bhuttah and You, 2020).

In Nigeria, though there seems to be an increased interest in using e-learning as a result of the emergence of Covid-19, very little is known on whether the students who are undergoing e-learning in Nigerian universities are facing some of these challenges. And if they do, is Social-Support provided to alleviate the problem? It is in view of this paucity of literature that this study investigates whether students in Nigerian universities face emotional problem during e-learning, if they do, what type of problems do they face? Is Social-Support available for students during e-learning in Nigerian universities? If it is available, who provide the Support, what type of support is available and how adequate is the support? Is there any significant difference between male and female in all these key study variables?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social support is the assistance provided to a person by individuals who are in a meaningful relationship with the person concerned (Liu, Xiao, Fang, Zhang & Lin, 2020; Mishra, 2020). In e-learning, social support refers to the sense of community and connection that learners experience through online learning platforms, tools, and resources (Rehman, Bhuttah and You, 2020). It involves creating an environment where learners feel supported, encouraged, and motivated to succeed despite physical distances (Rehman, Bhuttah and You, 2020). Social support in e-learning according to Kjellstrand, Clark, Caffery, Smith & Eddy (2022), can include: Emotional support (i.e., expressions that convey care, trust, love and empathy), Instrumental support (i.e., supply of tangible aid and services), Appraisal support (i.e., provision of helpful information for self-evaluation), and Informational support (i.e., advice, suggestions, information about environment). This can be provided in: Online discussions and forums; Live chats and webinars; Peer feedback and review; Virtual mentoring and coaching; Social media groups and communities; Collaborative projects and activities; and Emotive and empathetic support from instructors and peers.

Studies have shown that Social-Support serves a buffering role in helping an individual to cope in a stressful situation (Hellfeldt, López-Romero & Andershed, 2020). And that when an individual believes that support is available to him, he can withstand stressful events in life; Reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness; Increase learner engagement and motivation; Improve learning outcomes and retention; Enhance overall learning experience (Barrafrem, Västfjäll & Tinghög, 2020).

Other studies have found Social-Support to be a notable contributor of students' motivation to learn. Abdullah and Al-Mofti (2017) found Social-Support as a motivating factor of learning among university students. Similarly, Eskiler and Küçükibiş (2019) has found Social-Support as a motivator of secondary students to participate in learning activities. Additionally, the findings of Lin (2020) showed that Social-Support has the predictive influence of motivating older learners to learn. Therefore, the mediating role of Social-Support has become more significant in recent times.

In addition to motivating students at different level, Social-Support is a determinant of students' academic achievement (Lakhani, Jain & Chandel, 2017). Although few earlier studies have found no relations between Social-Support and students' academic achievement at the elementary and middle school (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017; Rueger, Malecki & Demaray, 2010), many other recent studies revealed that Social-Support results in higher academic achievement of students at all level of education (Fang, Chan & Kalogeropoulos, 2019; Lin, 2020).

Studies have also shown that Social-Support contributes to the development of resilience which is paramount to stress management. Lök and Bademli (2021) found that resilience has a high positive correlation with perceived Social-Support. And that when an individual perceived to be supported by others, it is expected that the individual will be encouraged to manage difficulties that may result from stress. Similarly, Fang et al. (2019) found that when children from below-average family incomes perceived Social-Support from family, peers, and teachers, they become resilient in their academic pursuit. This is corroborated by Satyaninrum (2019), which

showed that Social-Support positively influence academic resilience in adolescents. It is important to note that studies have found that academic resilience encourage students' learning readiness and satisfaction in the online learning process (Kumalasari & Akmal, 2020).

Other studies have shown that Social-Support contribute significantly in cushioning the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on students' academic activities (Abdullah, Shamsi, Jenatabadi, Ng & Mentri, 2022; Camacho, Correia, Zaccoletti & Daniel, 2021). And that Social-Support minimized loneliness, depression, and anxiety among adults during Covid-19 (Ferber, Weller, Maor, Feldman, Harel-Fisch & Mikulincer, 2022; Harrison, Moulds & Jones, 2022; Rosen et al, 2022); increased life satisfaction (Huang & Zhang, 2022); adjustment (Wesley & Booker, 2021) among college students; promote physical activities (Hailey et al., 2022); self-efficacy among teachers (Yenen & Carkit, 2023); and also protected HealthCare Workers against negative mental health outcomes (Ortiz-Calvo et al., 2022). However, it appears that not many studies were found to have been conducted in Nigeria on Social-Support especially at the university level, and for students on e-learning.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the theoretical perspective of Social-Support by Lakey and Cohen (2000).

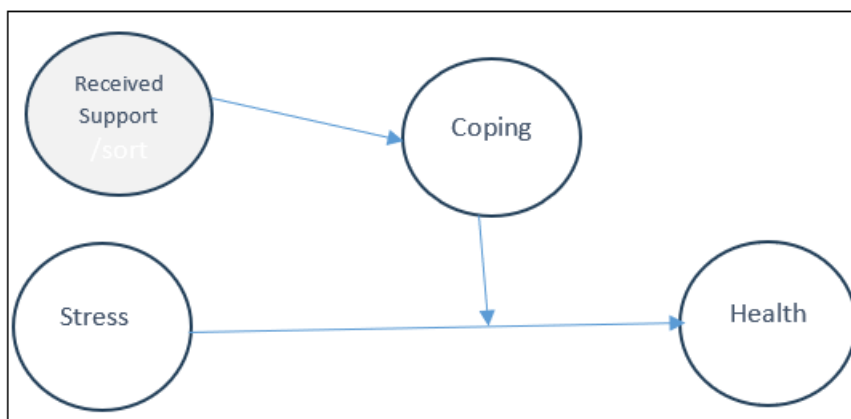


Figure 1: Adopted from Lakey and Cohen (2000).

According to this theoretical perspective, supportive actions given enhances coping, and serve as a buffer between stress and health outcomes. In other words, Social-Support reduces the impact of negative emotion on socio-emotional wellbeing of individuals. This can come either through support-related actions from various sources or even individual's perception of the availability of support. Support-related actions in the form of actual assistance received from others provide protection from stress, anxiety and frustrations through the promotion of coping, thereby fostering the achievement of socio-emotional wellness. Similarly, the perception of the availability of support influences appraisals an cushions the effects of negative emotion on socio-emotional health. Appraisals here have to do with the interpretation of potential threatening situations as less stressful and less frustrating.

Therefore, since is it established that students pass through different negative emotion during e-learning, it is critical to check if social support is available to the students that might reduce the challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The aims of this study is to investigate issues related to the availability of Social-Support during e-learning in North-Central Universities of Nigeria. Survey Design was used in the study. Five universities were purposely selected for the study. These five (5) Universities were the universities that conducted e-learning during covid-19 in North-Central Nigeria. Stratified Random Sampling was used to select 380 students to serve as a sample for the study. Data were collected using the Social-Support Questionnaire (SSQ). The questionnaire was adapted from Malecki, Demaray & Elliott (2000) and validated by two experts. The reliability index of the instrument was found to be 0.972. This showed the internal consistency and homogeneity of the questionnaire items. The

filled questionnaires were retrieved, cleaned and analyzed. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

RESULTS

Out of the 380 questionnaires distributed, a total of 352 (93%) were properly filled, retrieved and used for analysis. Results in table 1 show the response of the students on whether they face negative emotions during e-learning or not.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Students' Responses on Whether they Faced Negative Emotions During E-learning

Questionnaire Item	Response Options	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Did you face negative emotions during e-learning?	Yes	277	79
	No	75	21

Results in table 1 show that majority of the students 277 (79%) faced negative emotions during e-learning. This is against only 75 (21%) students that indicated that they have not encountered negative emotions during e-learning. Furthermore, table 2 shows the types of negative emotions the students encountered during e-learning.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Responses of Students on the Types of Negative Emotions they Encountered During E-learning

Questionnaire Item	Negative emotion options	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Which among the following negative emotions did you encounter during e-learning in your university?	Stress	246	89
	Anxiety	159	57
	Uncertainty	201	73
	Depression	124	45
	Frustration	260	94

Note: The respondents have the option of multiple selection

Results in table 2 reveal that out of the 277 students that faced negative emotions during e-learning, 246(89%) encountered Stress; 159(57%) Anxiety; 201(73%) Uncertainty; 124(45%) Depressed; and 260(94%) Frustrated.

Findings on the Type of Social-Support students obtained during e-learning are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Responses on the Types of Social-Support Received During E-learning

Types of Social-Support	Frequencies	(%)
a. Emotional Support	14304	11
b. Informational Support	14780	12

c. Appraisal Support	14256	11
d. Instrumental Support	13600	11
Total Social-Support obtained	56940	45
*Maximum Response obtainable	126720	100

Note: The respondents have the option of multiple selection.

*Maximum Response Obtainable is where respondent select all options

Results in table 3 show that 11% of Social-Support obtained are Emotional, 12% Informational, 11% Appraisal, and 11% Instrumental. This shows that Informational support was the highest support received during e-learning.

Findings on the Sources from which students received the Social-Support during e-learning are in table 4.

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Responses on the Sources from which Students Obtained Social-Support During E-learning

Sources of Social-Support	Frequencies	(%)
a. Parents	12964	10
b. Teachers	10260	8
c. Classmates	12500	10
d. Close Friends	12768	10
e. Other People	8448	7
Total Social-Support obtained	56940	45
Maximum Response obtainable	126720	100

Note: The respondents have the option of multiple selection.

*Maximum Response Obtainable is where respondent select all options

Results in table 4 show that out of the total Social-Support obtained, 10% was obtained from Parents, 8% from Teachers, 10% from Classmates, 10% from Close Friends and 7% from other people in the University. This reveals that students received more Social-Support from Parents (10%), Classmates (10%) and Close Friends (10%) than from Teachers (8%) and other people in the University (7%)

Findings on the Adequacy of Social-Support obtained by students during e-learning from different sources are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Adequacy of Social-Support Obtained from Diverse Sources During E-learning

Sources of Social-Support	Adequacy	Adequacy (%)
a. Parents	6783	11
b. Teachers	4573	7

c. Classmates	6850	11
d. Close Friends	5710	9
e. Other People	4230	6
Total Social-Support obtained	28146	44
Maximum Response obtainable	63360	100

Results in table 5 show that the rating of the adequacy of the Social-Support obtained was 44%. This reveals that the Social-Support received during e-learning was inadequate. However, Social-Support from Parents (11%) and Classmates (11%) was more adequate than from Close Friends (9%), Teachers (7%) and other people in the University (6%).

To check if significant difference exist between the type of negative emotions faced by male and female students during e-learning, the results are presented in table 6.

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests Analysis on the Types of Negative Emotions faced by Male and Female Students During E-learning in Universities in North-Central Nigeria

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.183 ^a	4	.382
N of Valid Cases	934		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.34.

Results in table 6 shows that Pearson Chi-Squared statistic $\chi^2 = 4.183$, degrees of freedom = 4, and the corresponding p-value = 0.382 > 0.05. Therefore, no significant difference was found between the type of negative emotions faced by male and female students during e-learning.

Findings from testing of significant difference between the Type of Social-Support obtained by male and female students during e-learning are presented in table 7. Testing at an alpha level of 0.05, results in table 7 show that the p – value is greater than alpha across all types of Social-Support. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This revealed that is no significant difference between the types of Social-Support obtained by Male and Female students during e-learning.

Table 7: Independent sample t- test Analysis of the Types of Social-Support Obtained by Male and Female Students During E-learning in Universities in North-Central Nigeria

Social-Support Types	Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	t – value	P - value
Emotional	Male	237	40.44	18.069	195.758	-0.262	0.794
	Female	115	41.04	21.329			
Informational	Male	237	41.78	19.385	260.116	-0.313	0.755
	Female	115	42.41	16.580			
Appraisal	Male	237	40.30	17.172	350	-0.305	0.760

	Female	115	40.90	17.586			
Instrumental	Male	237	38.45	16.730	350	-0.296	0.767
	Female	115	39.03	18.113			

Findings from testing of significant difference between the sources from which male and female students obtained Social-Support are presented in table 8.

Table 8: Independent sample t- test Analysis of the Sources of Social-Support Obtained by Male and Female Students During E-learning in Universities in North-Central Nigeria

Sources of Social-Support	Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	t – value	P – value
Parents	Male	237	36.65	16.489	187.677	-0.251	0.802
	Female	115	37.20	20.527			
Teachers	Male	237	29.01	13.298	350	-0.273	0.785
	Female	115	29.43	14.634			
Classmates	Male	237	35.34	15.380	350	-0.298	0.766
	Female	115	35.87	16.427			
Close Friends	Male	237	36.10	15.315	350	-0.293	0.770
	Female	115	36.63	17.718			
Other People	Male	237	23.89	10.727	350	-0.274	0.784
	Female	115	24.23	12.099			

Testing at an alpha level of 0.05, results in table 8, show that p-value was greater than alpha across all sources of Social-Support. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the sources from which male and female students obtained Social-Support during e-learning.

Testing of significant difference between male and female students’ ratings of adequate Social-Support during e-learning are shown in table 9.

Table 9: Independent Sample t- test Analysis of Students’ Ratings of Adequate Social-Support Obtained by Male and Female Students During E-learning in Universities in North-Central Nigeria

Sources of Social-Support	Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	t – value	p - value
Parents	Male	237	21.03	6.284	307.269	9.348	0.000
	Female	115	15.63	4.382			
Teachers	Male	237	13.24	1.355	346.312	6.852	0.000
	Female	115	12.48	0.730			

Classmates	Male	237	20.59	6.221	266.399	5.515	0.000
	Female	115	17.12	5.179			
Close Friends	Male	237	17.27	5.591	342.801	7.613	0.000
	Female	115	14.06	2.295			
Other People	Male	237	12.03	0.157	236.000	2.476	0.014
	Female	115	12.00	0.000			

Results in table 9 show that p-value is less than t-value and less than alpha level of 0.05 for male and female students' ratings of adequate Social-Support from Parents, Teachers, Classmates, Close Friends and People in the University during e-learning. Therefore, there is no significant difference between male and female students' ratings of adequacy of Social-Support during e-learning.

DISCUSSIONS

In line with what is in the literature, this study revealed that students faced negative emotions in the form of stress, Anxiety, Uncertainty, Depression, and Frustration during e-learning in Universities in North-Central Nigeria. Furthermore, it was found that Frustration was the highest form of negative emotion encountered by the university students during e-learning. This followed by Stress, Uncertainty, Anxiety, and Depression. More so, no significant difference was found between the type of negative emotions faced by male and female students. These findings correspond with Hilliard, Kear, Donelan and Heaney (2020), Hedges (2017), Rapp-McCall and Anyikwa (2016). Surprisingly, further investigation indicated that the negative emotions faced by students did not deter them from doing their assignments/projects online, engaging in online discussions, and responding to their school demands. This resilience might be as a result of some of the Social-Support obtained as shown by some other studies (Lök and Bademli, 2021).

Among many different types of support obtained by students, Informational Support is the highest. While the remaining other support obtained (i.e., Emotional Support, Appraisal Support and Instrumental Support) got equal rating. This is not surprising as other studies have reported similar findings (Väisänen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Toom and Soini, 2016) in Finnish Universities. Additionally, no significant difference was found between the types of Social-Support received by male and female students.

It was found that students perceived the Social-Support they received during e-learning as inadequate. This could be real or attributed to a mismatch between actual Social-Support provided and the support requested by students. It was reported that in a situation where supportive actions provided do not match with the need of the recipients, they can be misinterpreted by the recipients thereby resulting in tensions instead of helping the recipients cope or manage negative emotions encountered (Taylor et al., 2019; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Tetzloff & Barrera, 1987). Results further showed that male students indicated a higher rating of adequate Social-Support than their female counterparts.

It was found that students obtained Social-Support from Parents, Teachers, Classmates, Close Friends and Other people in the University. Surprisingly, it was found that students received more Social-Support from Parents, Classmates, and Close Friends than from Teachers and People in the University. These findings are similar with Reer and Krämer (2019); Stanger et al. (2018) and Bakadorova et al. (2019) who revealed that Social-Support from Parents is the most prevalent and important among students. Contrary to this, is the study by Katz, Kaplan and Gueta (2010) which found that Social-Support from Teachers is most significant to students. However, it is surprising to find that even though online classes and interactions were facilitated by Teachers, students received more Social-Support from Parents, Classmates, and Close Friends than from Teachers. The study also found no significant difference between the sources from which male and female students obtained Social-Support.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the integration of e-learning into our educational system is becoming the norm rather than the exception, then it is important to know the challenges associated with that. Now that it is established that during e-learning students face some negative emotions that affect students learning, it is therefore recommended that Social-Support should be included in the preparation and implementation of any e-learning program. Doing that would help students to cope with the negative emotions that might arise.

It was found that students obtained Social-Support more from Parents, Classmates and Close Friends than from Teachers. Thus, there is need for regular workshops, seminars and trainings for teachers and staff on how to effectively provide Social-Support to students during e-learning.

Finally, no significant difference was found between male and female students and the type of negative emotions faced; Social-Support obtained; and the sources from which Social-Support was obtained during e-learning. However, the rating of Social-Support Adequacy was found to be higher with male than with female students. Therefore, attention should be given to the similarities and disparities of both gender in the provision of Social-Support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is part of an ongoing research on the Retrospective Investigation into Nigerian Response to the Covid 19 Educational Crises, and is supported by TETFUND under Institutional Based Research (IBR).

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